

[I Got a Record]

Molly Kensey (Negro)

Restaurant Operator, Nurse & Washerwoman

610 Fair Street, S. W.

By -

Geneva Tonsil,

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I GOT A RECORD.

"You say you want me to talk to you 'bout the experiences uv my life, is this somethin' 'bout 'Gone With The Wind'? Oh, I thought maybe it was,, I've heard so much 'bout the Premiere of 'Gone With The Wind' I jes' know'd when you axed me to talk with you it was somethin' 'bout that. Well, that's alright, I wouldn't have mind tellin' you nohow ef it was, fer I got a record and I don't mind tellin' it to nobody.

"I was ten years ole when set free and I wus set free with a blind ma. Dey sold my father in 1858. I nevah 'member seein' him. See I wus three years ole and I don't 'member him. Dey sold him from ma and five chilluns.

"My home life was 'bout lak the ordinary chile's in them days and I guess I wus 'bout lak the chilluns is today. All I can say wus jes' a little bad gal. 'Course, I was nevah a very small girl in stature, wus very large and when I wus only a small girl people always called me 'woman' because uv my size. I don't 'spect I wus no diff'nt to the chilluns' terday fer I notice they do 'bout the same things I did when a chile.

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"I was born and raised in Washington, Georgia, rat in town and I nevah saw the country or cotton grow till I wus 'bout grown. I don't know whether I know'd whut it wus or not befo' then, I may have.

"My father uster b'long to Mr. Sam Ellington. He sold him to Dick Petite, a spec'later, from Mississippi. I don't 'member it but my ma tole us chilluns 'bout it when we grow'd up.

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"Dey had slaves in pens, brung in droves and put in dem pens jes' lak dey wus cows. Dey sold dem by auctionin' off to the highest bidder. I wus only a chile and nevah went 'round much. Dey put girls on the block and auctioned dem off, 'What will you give fer dis nigger wench?' Lot of the girls wus bein' sold by their master who wus their father, taken rat out uv the yards with their white chilluns and sold lak herds uv cattle.

"My sister was given away when she wus a girl. She tole me and ma that they'd make her go out and lay on a table and two or three white men would have in'ercourse with her befo' they'd let her git up. She wus jes' a small girl hone. She died when she wus still in her young days, still a girl. Oh! You is blessed to live in this day and don't know the tortures the slaves went through. Honey, slavery wus bad, but I wus so young I missed all the evil but chile I know'd 'bout it.

"My master whipped me once and he never jes' whipped me fer nothin'. It was somethin' I'd done. I wus scared uv him too. I see chilluns doin' things they shouldn't do, but I can't say nuthin' fer I 'member I wus a chile and did the same thing once. I got a lot uv whippings from my ma for I wus a bad chile. My master would tell me to do a job and I'd do it, willingly, but I went 'bout it slow lack and he'd holler, 'Concarn it, get a move on yer.' I'd say, 'I make hase terreckly, Mars George, I make hase.'

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"My ma's fust owner wus Marse Hamilton and he give her way to Marse Dison. Then Marse Dison give ma and us chilluns to Marse George. When I wus named I wus named for Miss Woodson Calloway, our mistress' sister.

"I wus born in Washington, Georgia, on February 28, 1855, and when I wus set free with a blind ma, she took me to Sparta, Georgia.

"I had ter work hard fer with a blind ma it wus nothin' she could do to 3 earn money. I didn't have nobody to help me but ma's brother. I'd go ter him ter git a little somethin' fer food. I stayed in Sparta until 1928. I got lots of work there.

"I married in Sparta and wus very happy. My husband took care uv me and life wusn't so hard. He died and in a year or so atter that I married agin. My fust husband wus good to my blind ma and when she died he come home from work to stay with me and console me. He wus a good, Christian man. My fust husband drove a carriage for drummers 'round through the country. He loved me. He supported me and our chilluns, and my blind ma. The white folks he worked for lak'd him and they wus nice to me too. After my husband's death, I worked and made a good living. I cooked, washed and ironed fer the white folks. When I married my second husband I sho'ly married a wealthy man. I 'member I went into the smoke house and when I saw all that meat, hams, shoulders, lard and sausage in dat house, I said 'Lawdy, is all dis mine?' He had turkeys, geese, guinea and ducks. He had a lot uv chilluns and when I married him the white folks said a quorum uv us got together and asked ourselves, 'Whut did a woman lak you marry ole man Kensey fer?' I tole them 'cause I wus jes' lonesome, I wus tired uv living by myself.

"After my husband, Mr. Kensey, died, I opened a restaurant in Sparta and I din't run no shoddy place either. The best people et at my place. Mr. Britt, a business man there in Sparta and for whose wife I'd nursed, would tell people to go down to eat at 'Mollie's' place. I fed white and colored. I had a place in front where I served the white and they

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liked my victuals too. Soldiers, railroad men, and drummers come to eat at my place. I stayed in Sparta until 1918, when times got so bad.

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Mr. Britt had a friend, a Mr. Kaufman, dat lived in Atlanta and he et at my place at times. Mr. Kaufman said he saw I wus a smart woman and asked me why I didn't come to Atlanta? He tole me he'd get me a job there as a nurse. See, he'd seed how I nursed fer Mrs. Britt and saw I wus a good nurse.

"I come to Atlanta in 1928 and got a job lak Mr. Kaufman promised me. I've worked for Mrs. Stephens, Mrs. Adams, and a lots uv other white folks since the job with Mrs. Kaufman. When I 'plied fer my ole age pension they all signed my papers and recommended me high.

"I'm ole and I've nevah done nothin' to nobody. I nevah did lak a lot uv other ole women, run places of vice. I nevah run no bad house, I've lived right. Honey, I've a history and I'm proud uv it. I'm glad fer the world to know I've lived and I feel proud to talk 'bout it.

"After I worked fer different families, I started washing and ironing fer the Chevrolet Company. I washed fer the men workers there and I made \$17 and \$18 a week. Honey, I always worked and made my living after my husband died and did it till I wus too ole. I nevah asked a soul fer a penny. Peopel have given me small change after I tole them my pension had been taken away from me. I didn't ask fer a penny. I guess my eyes jes tole them uv my condition. See I had to work fer myself. All my chilluns had died.

"My last son died and left a chile. The ma had died befo' him. I took the chile to live with me. I know'd he'd be lonesome widout his ma and pa and I wus so alone and wus glad ter git him to stay wid me. Well, we wus gittin' 'long well and then God took my grandson and lef' me alone - all alone wid nobody, no relatives. No one ter do a thing fer me. I washed and prayed 'cause I know'd God know'd what he wus doin' and that I'd never 5 be alone as long as God lived. He would always be my company. I thanked God and stayed in the

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straight and narrow path. I got tired, my back ached, my feet got sore, and my legs would give 'way sometime but I worked on and on, thankin' God dat He'd spared me to stay on heah. Honey, I know'd he kept me fer somethin' and I wus thankful.

"One day, in 1930, when I'd lost my grandson I wus so burdened and sad, I met a white woman in the street. She looked at me and must've seed my heart, fer she said, 'say, you look worried and burdened. Well, I've taken your burdens, I have them all now and, listen, you go home and read the Ninety-first Psalm and read them three times a day.' I went home and time I got there I got my Bible and I found the scripture she tole me to read and there I saw, 'He that dwelleth in the secret places of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence... Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and on I read and chile, I got 'lief, I felt light and wusn't burdened and chile, I've read that Psalm three times a day ever since. I have learned it by heart. It has been a prop for me. It consoles me, chile, and I want you to go home and read it. Get your Bible and read it, read it three times a day, and ask God for what you want and he gwine ter hear you. Read it, chile, won't you?

"I'm glad I know how to read. I read everythin' I get my hands on.

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Oh, it's sich a comfort. I did know how to write but I got sick once, and after I wus well, I couldn't write, I'd forgot how to make a 'D' even.

"You wants ter know how I made out after my grandson died and I got too ole to work? I went and asked fer my pension and them white folks sent in some good rec'mendations fer me. I got it. They sunt me \$13.50 every month. Honey, I needed it. I didn't have nobody to get me a mouf'ful of vittles. But let me tell you this before I tell you 'bout my pension.

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"Befor' I moved from Washington Street ter come ovah heah I wus washing one day and I wus so weary. A chile dat I know'd since he wus knee high to a duck - he wus my best friend's chile and he played 'round my do' steps wid my grandson - honey, you may not believe it but dat chile come up. He wus grown then. I was there washin', singin, and prainin' God dat he had let me live. He later tole me that he stood ther watchin' he said to hisself, 'God, fix it so I can take care of Miss Mollie.' He said I had my head tied up and I seemed so happy. He said he kept that thought in mind and, atter his mother died and only him and his brother lived in the house, he come for me. His mother had left a big house with nobody in it but the two boys. Everybody 'spected him to go out and bring in high-fer'lutin' people to live with them, but he din't. Chile, he went out atter Lazarus - he bro'ght in pore me. He said he watched me wash, wash, evah day that he come to see me and his desire wus to do somethin' fer me as he watched me, suds flyin' and body bent, singin' wid the sperit of God in my soul, because I looked so tired and alone. He made up his mind then and there, 'I'm goin' to take Miss Mollie home wid me and she won't have ter work so hard.' Chile, when he said, 'Miss Mollie, 7 come on and stay with me and my home will be our home,' I could hardly believe my ears when it did go through my haid, honey, I fergot them suds and them clothes. I throw'd up my hands and shouted fer joy, 'cause there wus God showerin' his blessings on me. Chile, I'd been singled out and God wus givin' me a home. I know'd all 'long that God wusn't goin' ter let me stay ther by myself. I stayed with God. I worked for him. I got a record with God and he was 'wardin' me fer that record. He took me out uv the mirey clay and put my feet on higher groun', he brough me outa that tub, Honey, I wusn't able to stay there nowhow, but 'Miss Mollie' jes' had ter keep gwinin'. Honey dats the fruit of havin a record wid God.

"I jined the A.M.E. Church in 1871. I crossed ovah on the Law'd side then and have been there evah since and I'm so proud uv it.

"Did I tell you that God called me to preach? Well, he did in 1914. I wus in Sparta, in my restaurant, and I wus tired, I went out on the front steps and sot down. While I sot there

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I saw a young boy that I'd know'd since he wus a baby in his ma's arms, and some more mens, in stripes, chained tergether, from the chain gang. I sot there, my heart bleedin' fer that boy, my heart wus so heavy and I had so much sorrow in my heart fer him, and I prayed for him. I couldn't get him offa my mind. I went home that night and read my Bible, honey, I got wid the Lawd. I turned page atter page and read. I got down on my knees and prayed. I said, 'God, I don't want to go to the chain gang and I don't want to go to hell, I want to be your servant, take me and use me as you will.' That mornin', jes' befo' day, I had a call. God Almighty put a seal on my right hand, this hand, chile, this hand, and he lifted me in a airplane and carried me through the sky and landed me down in my church yard. Honey, I wus preachin', preachin, tellin' what God 8 had done and uv his blessings. When I landed in the churchyard some uv my sisters and brothers uv the church wus there. Some uv the sisters said, "Heah you come wid a new 'ligion.' I tole them, no this is the same ole time 'ligion and God had called me ter preach, go out and tell the worl' uv his great love and I wus preachin' and wus gwine ter do service fer Him. He had put a seal on my hand, markin' me fer his cause. I tole my husban' 'bout it. I said, 'Mr. Kensey, a woman that had the call I had 'fo day did morning would nevah squeeze another dish rag agin but would take her grip in her han' and go out to preach.'

"I still didn't go out and preach on the highways and byways but I tell you I preached and I'm still preachin'. I'm preachin in my home.

"I've stayed in the A. N. E. Church since I was sixteen years old. Both uv my husbands wus Baptists but I stayed in the A. M. E. Church. Some people have gone from church to church but I stayed in the faith and I'm gwine ter [hebon?] some day. Honey, I'm gwine ter put on my robe, my crown, my golden slippers and gwine ter heben, chile I'm gwine ter walk them golden streets and I ain't gwine ter study war no more. Honey, I has fought a battle heah.

"I gits happy ovah heah sometime and I can't keep quiet but I soon come to myself and say, "I'll have to stop this, people uv terday don't shout any more and they might think I'm

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crazy. They'll say Roy got a crazy ole woman ovah there.' So I keep quiet sometimes, but I jes' want ter shout and praise his name. But chile, of this ole world would take off some uv these airy ways and the people would come back ter God, on bended knees, shoutin' and lettin' the world know they wus living right, this would be a bettah worl' honey, a better worl' to live in. I read about the war all ovah this 9 worl,. Chile, that is a fulfillment uv the Bible. Chile, we is livin' in the Revelations, the last days. The end is not far away, fer this ole worl' is gwine ter be destroyed agin. God tole us, though, he wusn't gwine ter 'stroy it by watah this time but by fire. Honey, he'd gwine ter do that too. He tole them words years and years ago but they is fulfillin' 'cause with all these airplaines flying through the air, they droppin' bombs down on people, 'stroyin' hundreds and hundreds at the time, you know that's how God's gwine ter 'stroy this worl'. Honey, won't that be a pitiful day?

"I tole you I wus once gettin' my ole age pension and you wanted ter know why I ain't gittin' it now. My visitor jes' took my pension 'way from me. How did she do it? She did it 'cause she had no feelin' fer a pore ole woman. My visitor tole me she had to take it 'cause I had a stepdaughter in the city. Yes, I have a stepdaughter heah, but she ain't able to 'sport herself. She is sixty-seven years ole herself. She ain't nothin' ter me. I only married her father. She wus 'bout grown then. I'm jes' a ole woman, without nobody to give me a thing and of I hadn't taken in by Roy heah, I'd be in a bad fix and I tell you I'm thankful. I have another visitor and I've seed her only once since she's been on in the place uv the one that took my pension away from me.

"When the visitor come to tell me that they'd cut my pension I tole her she did me wrong and that God wus gwine ter make her suffer. She wusn't gwine ter prosper. God ain't goin' ter bless her, fer heah I wus with nobody to keep me and she cut me off. Heah I wus unable to git about on my feet. I tole her everything and tole her the truth. She kept sayin she cut me off because I have a stepdaughter, jes' think uv it, she took my pension fer a little somethin' lak that. I tole her I'd tole her 'bout my stepdaughter and I [????????]

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there the same thing and evah thing I know'd from the birth of Jesus Christ to the birth of the devil. My stepdaughter is ole and unable to do fer herself, let 'lone me. I tole all them white folks that when I first went ter dat 'leaf office and 'plied fer the ole age pension and what did she want to cut me of fer. Them white folks had seed from all the recommendations sent them that I wus in need and that everybody said I wus in need and that everybody said I wus a hard worker long as I could. I wus no skinflint. I worked and I'd do it now ef I wus able. Well, they saw that and give it to me and I felt so good. I didn't feel a burden on Roy heah 'cause I give him pay fer half uv the coal I use and the vittles I et and I felt proud ter do it, but what did that nigger do, she took it away from me. Honey, you see me standin' heah, a pore, helpless, God fearin' critter. Jes' as she as I stands heah she's gwine ter reap it. She's flyin' high now, but, mind you, God's gwine ter punish her fer that. Honey, you see I ain't got nobody and I's too ole to work. I have ter inch along till I git outa a chair atter I set down. I ain't no 'count. That's why I wus so long letting you in. I jes' couldn't git up time I heard you knock. Honey, but I'm proud ter tell you, I didn't rust out, I'm jes' plain worn out, chile. give you my his'try, yes, I'm glad ter give it, I'm glad fer them all ter know that 'Miss Mollie' is got a record.

"Honey, Listen, ain't you from that 'leaf office? [Cain't?] you do somethin' 'bout gettin' my pension back. I know you'd know how ter go 'bout it and you seed me, you seed that I'm a pore ole woman and you'd know jes' what to tell them white folks. You could git to see them. I can't. I went down there two or three times. I nevah got ter see nobody but them niggers and they always tell me somethin', but they jes' won't let me see 11 them white folks. Do somethin' 'bout it for me."

I explained to 'Miss Mollie' that there was nothing I could do to have her pension restored. I made it clear to her that I wasn't connected with the department that handled her pension. I did, however, try to explain clearly and convince her that her visitor didn't willfully take her pension as she thought and by no means had she done it because of malice to her. She had to obey orders handed down from higher authority and I asked her

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before she got too far obsessed with the idea to go and talk with her visitor, because I felt her pension would be returned to her as soon as money was available and that as far as I could understand it had been taken, not only from her but many many others, for the sake of reducing the overhead expense the department was running into daily. I also explained to her that in suspending the pension a reason for that suspension had to be given and that is why her visitor said she had a stepdaughter in the city, although she knew the daughter was doing nothing for her. It was a thing the department had to do immediately and the workers just snatched at anything so as to give a reason. She was so happy that I explained it to her. She said, Honey, I know'd you'd know 'bout it and would tell me, and it wus providential you come heah this day. I see it clearly now. I'm gwine ter do jes' lak you said, wait, fer I do believe from what you say, I'm gwine ter git it back.

“Honey, you fixin' ter go? I'm glad God sent you heah. Come back sometime and talk with 'Miss Mollie'. Ef you want ter know anything else 'bout me come back, I wus glad to give you my record, fer 'Miss Mollie' got a record, honey, I got a record and I ain't ashamed uv it and I'll tell you the truth, I got a record with God too.”